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LETTER DATED 16 JULY 1999 FROM THE CHARGE D'AFFAIRES A.I. OF THE PERMANENT MISSION OF SIERRA LEONE TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to forward herewith an address to Parliament by President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, on the Lomé Peace Agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front (see annex).

It would be greatly appreciated if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Fode M. DABOR
Ambassador, Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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Annex

Address to parliament by the President of Sierra Leone on the signing in Lomé of the comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front

When my government came into office, the thrust of our policy was two-fold. First to end a war we had not started and second to provide opportunities for all Sierra Leoneans to realise their full potential. Two days ago, in an address prior to my departure for Lome, I told the Nation that inspite of the conflicting reports we had been receiving over the previous few days and hours, I had reason to believe that we were close to finalising a peace agreement with the RUF that would provide real and lasting peace for our country. I am pleased to report that our expectations have become reality. Yesterday, July 7, I signed, on behalf of all peace loving Sierra Leoneans, a document which, by God's grace, will lay a solid foundation for sustainable peace which has eluded us for more than eight years.

Today, Sierra Leoneans have every reason to sing and shout for joy. However, I do hope that we shall punctuate our celebration of this historic event with moments of prayers of thanksgiving or quiet meditation. I know that we have all been praying for our country and for the end of the armed conflict which has devastated it for nine years. However, our prayers for Sierra Leone should not end with the signing of the peace agreement. In fact, we should now intensify our prayers, for with the signing of the peace agreement, we have embarked on the long and painful journey of healing and national reconciliation.

There will be plenty of time to discuss, explain, debate, analyze and interpret the contents of the Lome agreement and my Government will ensure that every citizen of this country is given the opportunity to fully participate in this process. In this regard, a comprehensive national sensitization strategy will be worked out and implemented by the Ministry of Information, Communication, Tourism and Culture in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth, Education and Sports; the National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights; the National Commission for Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Resettlement; and the National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration. The strategy will include nationwide tours by me.

In the next few days my Government intends to introduce a bill in Parliament which will incorporate the Lome Agreement. The Attorney General who was also the leader of the Government delegation at the peace talks will make himself available to elucidate all the articles of the agreement to members. Today, however, I would like to talk briefly about the spirit of Lome and highlight to you some of the most important provisions of the agreement.

As I said in my broadcast to the nation two days ago, when we decided to engage in negotiations with the RUF, we knew that the process was not going to be smooth sailing. We knew we would have to make some compromises. However, as I stated in my address at the State Opening of Parliament on June 11 this year, *"we entered the dialogue on the principle and conviction that Government derives all its powers and authority from the people, and this is the cornerstone of our Constitution."* I also assured you that *"...in our search for the peace which we all desire, we shall not mortgage that fundamental principle of democratic governance."*

I am pleased to inform you that the agreement we signed with the RUF yesterday does not in any way violate those fundamental principles. In addition to this, we have succeeded in upholding and preserving the sanctity of our Constitution.

During the course of the negotiations with the RUF, there were those, in and outside Lome, who said that the Government had a lot to give, and that the RUF rebels who had been in the bush for almost nine years, had nothing to give. I am sure today that there are those who are saying that the Government has given the RUF not just a lot but far too much, and that the RUF has given very little or nothing at all. However, I have no doubt you will agree with me that after so much pain and suffering, after so much destruction of life and property, it would be a disservice to this nation and its survivors if anyone should judge the peace agreement merely in terms of what was given or not given. In any case, the question of what was given should be evaluated in relation to the RUF's initial and constant demands.

I suggest that we should focus attention on what we have derived from Lome in terms of attaining peace and bringing an end to the suffering of our people.

Our priorities for current and post conflict security which are reflected in the Lome Agreement are the following:

First and foremost, all hostilities have now ended. All combatants of the RUF, CDF and paramilitary groups will be disarmed and demobilized by a neutral force comprising ECOMOG and United Nations observers. The phased withdrawal of ECOMOG will be directly linked with the phased training and deployment of the restructured Sierra Leone Armed Forces. Then there is provision for technical assistance in the identification, disposal or destruction of unexploded bombs, anti-personnel land mines and similar dangerous weapons. War victims will benefit from a special trust fund and the welfare and rehabilitation of all former combatants are also assured under an expanded disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programme.

In this regard, I am pleased to report that in order to ensure the speedy implementation of the disarmament and demobilisation programme which is crucial for the successful implementation of the Lome Agreement, I have today handed a letter to the United Nations Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan, requesting the urgent deployment of additional United Nations peacekeepers in Sierra Leone. I have been assured that the matter will receive urgent attention by the Security Council.

One of the most important articles of the Lome Agreement is that which makes provision for the establishment of a Commission for the Management of Strategic Resources, National Reconstruction and Development (CMRRD). You will recall that in my address at the State Opening of Parliament in 1998, I expressed dismay at the fact that the people of this country have not been benefiting from the numerous mineral resources we have, particularly gold and diamonds. I pointed out then that the State has in fact been subsidizing the activities of those who have been exploiting these resources, rather than deriving revenue from their activities. I am therefore pleased to inform you that the provisions of the article establishing the CMRRD will make this a thing of the past. Henceforth, the people of this country will reap the full harvest from the exploitation of our gold and diamonds.

The peace agreement we signed in Lome yesterday is the second peace agreement we have signed with the RUF. You will recall that in November 1996 we signed the Abidjan Peace Accord. As a result of this, I am sure there are serious doubts in the minds of many people as to whether this time we will succeed in our efforts to achieve lasting peace. Let me assure you that I am confident we will succeed this time. My confidence is based on the fact that there are major differences not only in the prevailing circumstances, but also in the letter and spirit of the two agreements.

In the first place, countries like Liberia, Burkina Faso and Libya were fully involved in the negotiation process and their leaders have committed themselves to doing all in their power to ensure that the Lome Agreement is fully implemented.

Secondly, the Lome Agreement establishes a Joint Implementation Committee with significant involvement of the international community for monitoring the implementation of the Agreement. A clear manifestation of the seriousness with which this task is being approached is the fact that members of the ECOWAS Committee of Seven on Sierra Leone have already agreed to visit Sierra Leone in August to assess progress on implementation of the agreement.

A third major difference between the Abidjan Peace Accord and the Lome Agreement is the security guarantees provided under the Lome Agreement which guarantee the safety and security of all Sierra Leoneans

At this point, I would like to emphasize that the signing of the peace agreement in Lome marks the end of the process of making peace. But it also marks the beginning of another difficult process, namely; peace-building, peace-keeping, and national reconciliation. If we fail to consolidate and keep the peace, or to build on what we have achieved in Lome, we would be denying our children their God given right to life and to live in peace and security and without fear.

I would therefore like us to dedicate and bequeath the peace agreement, as I did in Lome, to all the children of Sierra Leone – thousands of them – who have lost their lives or who have been maimed, orphaned, displaced, abused and made homeless. We should of course not forget those children who were given weapons to kill their elders. Let us reflect on the spirit of the agreement and the promise it holds for them and all other Sierra Leoneans.

In keeping with the spirit of Lome, therefore, and as a first step in consolidating the peace, my Government will take appropriate legal steps to effect the release from custody of all those charged

or convicted with treasonable offenses and to grant them free pardon. This has already been done for Corporal Foday Sankoh. I urge all Sierra Leoneans to accept them back into your midst so we can begin the difficult process of healing the many wounds inflicted by so many years of brutal conflict. At this time, it is important that there should be no reprisals from any quarter. I know it will be difficult for many of us, but in building peace, we must refrain from such acts. May I also add that the time is opportune for all of us to begin to cultivate the culture of trust in each other.

In the same spirit, I believe our people deserve an apology, or at least, a solemn expression of regret and deep sorrow from all those whose activities, undertaken in pursuit of their objectives, brought so much suffering to this nation. This, you will agree is the first prerequisite for pardon and reconciliation. I am therefore pleased to report that the leader of the RUF did express such regret at the ceremony for the signing of the peace agreement in Lome yesterday.

As I stated in my address at the State Opening of Parliament in June this year, the most profound element of the peace agreement we signed yesterday is the pledge that never again will Sierra Leoneans take up arms and use force against one another as a means of bringing about change in this country. There is also the pledge to settle all past, present and future differences and grievances peacefully through dialogue. These are embedded in the spirit of Lome.

I would also like to take this opportunity to suggest that in discussing the Lome peace agreement, we should take into account the fact that the conflict which has been brought to an end was our responsibility but not ours alone. Similarly, decisions for resolving it are our responsibility but not ours alone. Sierra Leone is a member of ECOWAS, the OAU, the Commonwealth and the United Nations. Our problems and aspirations must be viewed from the regional, sub-regional and international perspectives. We are not alone. We have faithful and reliable friends and allies, benefactors and partners, all of whom have in diverse ways helped to map out the journey that we began yesterday at the signing of the peace agreement. As guarantors of the agreement we have no doubt that they will travel along with us to monitor implementation of the agreement and to continue to assist us in our effort for the consolidation of peace and national reconstruction. Over and above this, and due to our sad experience, particularly in respect of the ineffective security situation we inherited, we have now put in place a security system which will ensure we will never again be taken by surprise.

To all Sierra Leoneans, both at home and abroad, to our brothers and sisters who today find themselves in refugee camps or are internally displaced, I would like to assure you that the action we have taken is in the best interest of our country, painful though it may be for some. Without peace we cannot survive as a nation. I therefore call on you to view the Agreement as an inevitable and essential step in our journey on the road to lasting peace and prosperity. In keeping with the new spirit of peace, I am pleased to inform you that with effect from today the curfew hours have been changed to 8.00 p.m to 7.00 a.m.

Let me end by expressing, on behalf of all Sierra Leoneans, our heartfelt thanks to President Eyadema of Togo for hosting the peace talks and to President Obasanjo of Nigeria for his timely initiative to give the peace-making process a new momentum. Let me also, on your behalf, express sincere gratitude to the troop contributing countries – Nigeria, Guinea, Ghana and Mali. Special thanks however go to Nigeria and Guinea, for shouldering so much of our security burden over the

past nine years. Our grateful thanks also go to Britain, China, the United States, ECOWAS, the OAU, the Commonwealth, the UN and all those other countries and organisations that, in one way or the other, have assisted us in getting to this point.

As a nation, we have finally emerged from darkness into light. May God grant that the peace agreement we signed in Lome yesterday is indeed the seal of a just and lasting peace in our beloved country.